

Evermay
1623 - 28th Street, N. W.
Georgetown, D. C.

HABS No. 61

HABS
DC
GEO,
49 -

PHOTOGRAPHS

District of Columbia

Historic American Buildings Survey
Delos H. Smith, District Officer
1707 I St., N.W., Washington, D.C.

ADDENDUM TO:
EVERMAY
Georgetown
1623 Twenty-eighth Street, Northwest
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS DC-61
DC, GEO, 49-

PHOTOGRAPHS

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FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
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1849 C Street NW
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ADDENDUM TO EVERMAY

HABS No. DC-61

Location: 1623 28th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

Present Owner: Harry Belin

Present Use: Private residence

Significance: The formality and elegance Evermay's architecture and landscaping create an ensemble of unparalleled beauty. The estate reflects twentieth-century aesthetics, rooted in and continuing Evermay's early nineteenth century architecture and landscape design. The property's considerable significance in terms of architecture and landscape architecture is augmented by the property's historical significance due to its extensive archives which contribute important information on the evolution of the estate, its owners, Georgetown, and Washington, D.C.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of erection: Owner Samuel Davidson retained surveyor and architect Nicholas King to design the house and gardens, with the drawings for the house delivered to Davidson in August 1800. Construction started in 1801 and all buildings for the estate were finished by June 1802.

2. Original and subsequent owners:

1792-1794	In four transactions, Thomas Beall sells adjacent parcels to Samuel Davidson, and in the final transaction the deed refers to the property as Evermay.
1804	Davidson acquires an additional acre from Beall.
1810	Davidson dies and his nephew Lewis Grant inherits and as required by his uncle's terms, changes his name to Lewis Davidson.
1832	Lewis Davidson dies and his wife Eliza Grant Davidson inherits.
1858	Eliza Grant Davidson and her second husband Charles Dodge sell off a substantial amount of the property, including the parcel for Oak Hill Cemetery.

1877	Dodges sell to John D. McPherson.
1907	Mary McPherson, the daughter of John D. McPherson, who died in 1899, inherits the property.
1919	Francis H. Duehay acquires the property.
1923	Ambassador F. Larnmot Belin acquires the property.
1996	Harry Belin inherits the property from his mother Mary Belin

3. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Nicholas Hedges was carpenter and builder for the main building. Robert McKay constructed the stable and might have built the kitchen. Miriam Lovering built the main gate.

4. Original plans and construction: According to "Chronology for Evermay" (Evermay archives) : "... Evermay was to be a formal brick notion, 54 fit x 38 fit wide, with a full cellar, two stories and an attic. A 2 ½ story kitchen wing was attached. Each floor contained four rooms, two on each side, divided by the hall. First floor ceilings stood nearly 13 feet high. The garret included two rooms, probably for servants and storage, separated by a passage. The plan also calls for 7 closets."

5. Alterations and additions: In 1888, McPherson added a wooden porch and sleeping porch, along with "Victorian trim." In addition, he changed the carriage driveway. Under the Belin ownership, starting in 1923, the late nineteenth-century accretions were removed, the grounds were redesigned, the west hyphen was rebuilt, interiors altered, and a wing was built behind the kitchen wing, extending the west side of the house to the north In 1960 a balancing wing was built on the east, giving the north facade a Ushape. The visual focus of the north courtyard is a Carl Milles sculptured black marble water fountain, also erected in 1960. The same year the east hyphen and orangery were constructed.

B. Historical Context:

In October 1803, Samuel Davidson paid Nicholas King "apparently after the fact - for a 'permanent plan of Garden and Orchard' ", according to a "Chronology For Evermay," prepared by Janice Artemel. This plan, which exists at Evermay, shows a quite large estate with somewhat irregular boundaries. From Back Street (now Q St.), the property runs east to Mr. Jackson's land (which is now Dumbarton House grounds), then north and again east (forming the west and north boundaries of Jackson's holdings) and then meandering northeast along Mill Road until Rock Creek. From Rock Creek due west until Montgomery Street (now 28th Street) and south along that street until its intersects Back Street. The irregular section of this parcel, which is the section bounded by Montgomery and Back Streets and Jackson's land was designed as a formal garden. The central wide path of that garden runs north- south and its visual termination is the

house, also designed by Nicholas King. As the wide house runs east- west it must have been a commanding and dramatic focus at the end of the long garden vista. Between the house and garden, King designed a fairly densely planted orchard with a very wide open space between the two groupings of trees. This space, which was directly north of the path through the garden and approximately twice the width, lined up with the west and east ends of the house. King cleverly related the garden to the orchard to the house, creating a harmonious processional, no doubt inspired by an appreciation of Renaissance artists' understanding of perspective and mathematics as applied to urban design and architecture. King created a U-shaped orchard to the east of the house, with the U facing the house, and on the west side of the house, he created a shallow U-shape, again facing the house. This sense of the orchards embracing and enclosing the house suggests the colonnade at the Vatican. The approach to the house from the south is demarcated by a tight row of trees, and rows of trees mark the immediate grounds of the house on the east and north as well as partially on the west. North of the house an open field gently curves to the north east along a drive or path that leads to a second building very close to the northern property boundary. This open space is flanked on the east and west by an orchard. The path from the house to this northern building forks to the southeast, about half between the main house and secondary structure. This second path curves around the orchard east of the house and leads to the garden and open space south of the main house, defining the orchard and reinforcing the relationship between orchard, garden, open space, and main house. At the point where the path starts to curve south it branches off into a large elliptical open space enclosing another outbuilding and it branches off into another path ruing east to Mill Road. South of this secondary path is a meadow on Davidson's property. King's sophisticated design of Evermay created a variety of landscape experiences, well integrated the house with the grounds, and gave Davidson a house that was not as exciting as the landscape design, but was in keeping with Federal period designs of Charles Bullfinch and William Thornton, such as the flat facade treatment, contrast between red brick walls and white (stone) window sills and basement, Palladian windows, and recessed panels between the first and second floor windows.

These same concerns with the landscape and its relationship to the house, and that the house express Federal period tastes have been reinforced and reinterpreted in the twentieth century. The Belins' late twentieth-century vision of Evermay is very different, but just as beautified and compelling as King's early nineteenth-century vision.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: A viewer not knowing the history of Evermay would assume that it was an early twentieth-century residence built in a Federal period style revival. It has Federal period detailing, especially the doors and surrounds, but the massing, in particular the wings, is not consistent with the Federal period. Upon closer inspection or with greater knowledge it would be apparent to the viewer that Evermay is indeed a Federal period house that has been carefully stripped of late nineteenth-century accretions and has compatible twentieth-

century additions and interior alterations.

2. Condition of fabric: The house appears to be in excellent condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Evermay has a five-part composition consisting of a 2 ½ story main block, two story hyphens and two story end wings.

The north facade, which is the side approached from the gate entrance on 28th Street, has projecting wings on either end creating a U-shaped massing. The hyphens are set slightly set back from the main block.

On the south facade, not only are the hyphens set back more, but the end wings do not project beyond the main block (except for the bow window of the orangery) so this facade, unlike the north facade, reads like a traditional five-part composition of the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century. In reality, the west hyphen and wing, which are the kitchen and pantry area, are farther set back than the east hyphen and wing, but this fact is not readily apparent because of the considerable width of the south facade makes it hard to view the entire facade and trees obstruct the view of the west hyphen and wing.

2. Foundations: On the south facade, the east window well closer to the front door has an exposed stone foundation. The other window wells are parged or do not show foundation. The interior basement walls are finished. It is, therefore, assumed that the house has a stone foundation based on the one window well.

3. Walls: The south facade is Flemish bond, while the north facade is American bond. Date stones appear in the west wing (1923), east wing (1960), and atop the west double chimney (1801).

4. Structural system, framing: It is assumed that the house is of load-bearing masonry construction.

5. Porches, stoops: The north and south facade main have stoops with two steps up to the door, as do the two doors on the hyphens on the south facade. The only porch is on the entrance to the kitchen on the west side of the west wing. Front and rear porches removed in 1923.

6. Chimneys: The main block has double, interior end chimneys at the east and west walls.

7. Openings:

- a. Doors and doorways: Federal period doorways are centered on the north and south

facades, with the north doorway having the tympanum filled with a wooden scalloped sunburst. To either side of door are side lights with stacked, back to back, concave muntins. Below each side light is a wooden panel. On the south facade, the tympanum is a fanlight. The other major differences are that the side's fanlight surround is wider than the door surround, and the pilasters between the door and side lights on the south door are fluted and have other minor decorations. The pilasters on the north door are plain. Both doors have keystones in their arches. The two doors in the hyphens on the south facade are simpler versions of the main door on the same facade.

b. Windows: The windows are six-over-six flanked by black louvred shutters. The sills are painted stone. On the south facade, the windows have projecting lintels supported by small blocks at either end. These lintels are painted the same color as the sills and also appear to be stone, but because of the detailing it seems more likely that at least the blocks are wood. The blocks supporting the lintels, which consist of two coronas separated by a bed moulding, are fluted. On the second story of the south facade, above the door is the house's most important window. This scaled-down Palladian window with shuttered panels rather than side lights has an intricate lintel with a series of adjacent circular voids. The design is similar to a guilloche, but has discrete circles rather than the intertwined circles. The windows on the orangerie are much larger and have round arches on the east side.

The lintels on the windows on the other facades are flat arches.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The main block and hyphens are gables, while the wings are hip. All roofs are covered in slate.

b. Cornice, eaves: The cornices of the main block are dentils supporting modillions supporting the fascia and cyma recta. The other cornices lack dentils and modillions.

c. Dormers: Each roof of the main block has three dormers with open-bed pediment and fanlight arched six-over-six windows. The end dormers are not aligned with the windows below, lining up between the first and second windows closest to the end walls. The middle dormer is above the door and second story window above the door.

The dormers were added in 1923 when the pediment on the south facade was removed and some small protrusions on the roof (a cupola and perhaps two vents) were also removed. That the top of the second story center window's lintel abuts the cornice above it suggests that that section of cornice was only added after the pediment was removed.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. First Floor: The main block has a center hall and stairs with one room to either side. The west hyphen and wing consists of pantry, kitchen and servant rooms. The east hyphen and wing consists of two small passages and large room in the east wing or orangerie that runs the depth of the wing. According to the 1923 plans, prepared by architect George Ray, there had been two rooms of equal size west of the center hall and he had the partition removed. These plans also showed two rooms east of the center hall, but they were of uneven size with only two pairs of columns separating the spaces. The larger room was at the south end of the space and occupied approximately two-thirds of the space. It is assumed that a solid wall (with perhaps a door) originally separated the two rooms, but had been opened up before the Belins purchased the property in 1923.

b. Second Floor: There are two rooms to either side of the center hall, along with bathrooms at the south end of the hall and a cross hall running from the center hall to the west wing. Neither the bathroom nor the cross hall appear original.

c. Attic: Not examined.

d. Basement: One large room and several small rooms, used for storage.

2. Stairway: An open string stair runs along the east wall of the center hall with a landing at the north wall. With three round, tapered balusters per tread, the most decorative details of the stair are the volute at the bottom, ivory button on the newel, and the curlicued strings. A secondary, servants' stairs is in the west hyphen.

3. Flooring: The handsome, wide plank wooden floors are most likely not original to the house. Ambassador Belin had thirty-nine old sections of oak "French flooring" installed in the house proper as well as "French parquet flooring" from Versailles (and other sites) laid in the west hyphen. In the front, half round space of the orangerie, travertine marble was used to cover the floor.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceiling in the hall are plaster, probably much of it from the 1923 renovation. The hall also has simple chair rail, baseboard, and cornice. In contrast, the rooms to either side have wood paneling. In the room to the west of the center hall, has an elaborately carved dado with Asian art themes. The west room has floor to ceiling English paneling with a leaf motif cornice.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and Doors: The door surrounds on the center hall are elaborate with fluted pilasters on bases capped by corner blocks with a petal quatrefoil, and paneled reveals. The west room has bull's eye corner blocks. The east room jambs meet the lintels at 45 degree angles, eliminating corner blocks. The east room door surrounds have a convex surface treatment.

b. Windows: Window surrounds are consistent with the wall treatments in their respective rooms.

6. Decorative features and trim: The two mantels in the west room have carved vines, while not identical to the dados, that repeat the Asian theme. The two mantels in the east room are white marble with dark veining and a cyma recta surface with a raised edge along the outside.

7. Hardware: The lock boxes on the six paneled front and rear doors look like reproductions of eighteenth-century hardware. All other hardware is clearly twentieth century.

8. Mechanical systems: The house is heated with steam radiators.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces south with views towards Georgetown and east towards downtown. The south lawn is terraced, with the closest terrace being a manicured clear space. Below it is the second terrace with a long ornamental pool with sculptured figures of cherubs and swans. A brick wall demarcates the south edge of the terraced lawn, but the wall has two ornamental gates that allow passage to adjacent properties also owned by the Belins. East of the house is another terrace with brick pavers, and a round colonnade with saucer dome. That terrace has a brick wall with stone balustrade marking its eastern edge. Several feet below that terrace is a landscaped lawn with stone benches facing across a platform of square stone slabs. To the east of this ensemble is another ornamental pool with round fountains at either end. Beyond this lawn there is a tennis court with a small pagoda viewing stand. North of these lawns the grounds are given over to flowers, other plantings, and a gardener's work area and greenhouse. From this section a steep road runs along the north edge of the property which is separated from Oak Hill Cemetery by a tall wall.

The 28th Street gate to Evermay is slightly north of the house and leads up an asphalt drive which curves slightly south to the a cobblestone courtyard on the north side of the house. On axis with the door on the north facade is a polished black marble fountain shaped like a ridged, closed flower bud, with water running down its sides. The outer edge of the pool of the fountain is defined by a low circular wall. The cobblestones radiate out from this fountain in a series of quarter rounds until they reach a straight cobblestone edge closest to the house. This fountain, by Carl Milles, although quite different in material, finish, color, and shape from the house works exquisitely as a focus for the courtyard and north facade of the house and as a visitor's visual introduction to Evermay. The fountain reduces the less distinguished north facade to its appropriate role as backdrop to a beautiful sculpture.

Evermay consists of 3.72 acres, according to the National Register of Historic Places nomination, prepared by the National Capital Planning Commission in May 1972.

2. Historic Landscape design: Nicholas King's design, which is known from his plan in the Evermay archives, has been described in detail in Section B.

3. Outbuildings: The several outbuildings noted on King's plan no longer with the possible exception of the groundskeeper's house which is adjacent to the gate. Its location, and perhaps its massing seem identical to the stable indicated on King's plan. It is a gable roofed that is two stories on the 28th Street (west facade) and on the north, but only one story on the other two sides. On the east facade, a large window bay might have once been stable doors and above it is a handsome Palladian window and equally handsome round arched windows flank the window bay.

In the 1940s, a one story building of offices was erected west of the house. This brick building is in keeping with the main building.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

While Evermay is discussed in all the standard books and articles on Georgetown, by far the best and, realistically, the only definitive source is the comprehensive Evermay archives. The archives appears to cover all periods and aspects of the history of the property.

Prepared by: Bill Lebovich, architectural historian, July 1999

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Georgetown Documentation Project was sponsored by the Commission of Fine Arts and undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) of the National Park Service. Principals involved were Charles H. Atherton, Secretary, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and E. Blaine Cliver, Chief, HABS/HAER. The documentation was undertaken in two phases. The summer 1998 team was supervised by John P. White, FAIA, Professor of Architecture, Texas Tech University; and architecture technicians Robert C. Anderson, Boston Architectural Center; Aimee Charboneau, Tulane University; Irwin J. Gueco, The Catholic University of America; and Adam Maksay, United States/International Council on Monuments and Sites (US/ICOMOS) architect from the Transylvania Trust. Historic research was initiated by Bryan C. Green, historian, Richmond, Virginia, during this summer. The summer 1999 team was supervised by Roger S. Miller, architect, Alexandria, Virginia, and architecture technicians David Benton, The Catholic University of America; Edward Byrde, The Catholic University of America; Irwin J. Gueco, The Catholic University of America; and Clara Albert, US/ICOMOS architect from the Transylvania Trust. The project historian, and author of the written reports, was William Lebovich, architectural historian, Chevy Chase, Maryland. The photography was undertaken by Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, and James Rosenthal, photographic assistant.